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Chemical Arms In Terrorism Feared by CIA

The gravest "clear and present danger" posed by chemical and biological weapons is not from aggressor nations, which are restrained by fear of retaliation, but from terrorists or lunatics who decide to use these hideous weapons for blackmail or to publicize their causes.

A secret CIA "Special National Intelligence Estimate," which had the concurrence of eight other federal intelligence agencies, expresses concern that the use of poison gas by the Soviets and the Iraqis (who got the ingredients from West German companies) "could influence the attitudes of terrorists toward use of chemical and biological weapons."

The report, which was reviewed by my associate Dale Van Atta, points out that chemical-biological weapons are not yet popular among terrorists—probably because they're terrified of them. But it warns that "one successful incident involving such [lethal] agents would significantly lower the threshold of restraint on their application by other terrorists."

In fact, these weapons have been

used in isolated cases by terrorists and others. In 1978, for example, a Palestinian group injected cyanide into citrus fruit exported by Israel. Huk guerrillas in the Philippines poisoned pineapples destined for export. In both cases, rapid and effective response to the discovery of the poisoned fruit prevented fatalities.

Similar incidents of "consumer terrorism" have been attributed to individuals, like the person who injected cyanide into pain-reliever capsules, and the ex-convict in Australia who threatened to infect herds with hoof-and-mouth disease last January.

The low cost of chemical-biological weapons and their relatively easy availability make them attractive to terrorists. Once they have overcome their fear of the weapons through training—by the Soviets, for example—terrorists will see the advantage of deadly agents that can be smuggled into a target area virtually immune from detection.

It costs hundreds of millions of dollars to build a nuclear bomb, whereas any reasonably intelligent biology or chemistry student can make a kilogram of deadly Type A botulin toxin for \$400, according to Pentagon consultant Joseph Douglass. He adds that with a forged research permit a terrorist could get anthrax germs by mail for \$35. One supply house offers samples of five toxins, including the probable lethal

ingredient of "yellow rain," for less than \$100.

A group of experts told a United Nations panel in 1969 that "for a large-scale operation against a civilian population, casualties might cost about \$2,000 per square kilometer with conventional weapons, \$800 with nuclear weapons, \$600 with nerve-gas weapons and \$1 with biological weapons." Inflation may have changed the figures, but not the deadly bargain ratio.

The United States is wide open to terrorists with chemical-biological operations in mind. The only federal agency that monitors the sale of deadly pathogens is the Agriculture Department. Universities and other research laboratories are poorly guarded, and the necessary knowledge is easy to gather.

"Clandestine production of chemical and biological weapons for a multiple-casualty attack generally raises no greater technical obstacles than does the clandestine production of chemical narcotics or heroin," the CIA report concludes.

Among law enforcement agencies, the Secret Service is particularly aware of the near-impossibility of protection against chemical-biological attacks. An expert told the presidential bodyguards that he could stroll through the White House with a tour group and leave behind an undetectable poison that would kill all the building's inhabitants by the next morning.